

January 7, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Jacob Lew  
Director  
The Office of Management and Budget  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Chairman  
House of Representatives  
Budget Committee  
207 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
Ranking Member  
House of Representatives  
Budget Committee  
207 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Mr. President, Director Lew, Chairman Ryan, and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

According to the new Republican majority, the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress will be focused on cutting the deficit. We know that difficult decisions will have to be made. The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform indicated broad agreement that serious steps must be taken, but lacked consensus on what those steps should be.

Although there are many opinions about how best to balance the budget, we believe that there is one crucial concept about which all Americans can agree: **no matter what steps we take to get our nation's finances in order, our children must be protected from the dangers of poverty.** As we seek solutions to our long-term fiscal problems, we must protect programs that lift children out of poverty and redouble our efforts to invest in children. We cannot afford to make any decisions that push more children into poverty.

Growing up in poverty is one of the most damaging circumstances a child can face. Poor children are sicker, do worse in school, enter the foster care system at a higher rate, and have more behavioral and emotional problems. They are also much more likely to live in poverty as adults, become incarcerated, or depend on public assistance.

As a result of the current recession, we have seen an unprecedented decline in child well-being. One in five kids now lives in a food insecure household, a disturbing statistic that jumped from 16% to 21% in the past year. Public schools have seen a 50% increase in the number of homeless students. Children are more likely to be abused or neglected during difficult economic times. These adverse childhood events translate into a long-term human capital deficit in the United States, robbing our country of these children's potential. Child poverty is also expensive, costing the United States an estimated \$500 billion due to lost productivity and increased expenditures in health care and criminal justice.

One in five American children now live in poverty. This should be unacceptable in a country as prosperous as ours. Great Britain has faced similar challenges, but in 1999 they declared a war on child poverty. Ten years later, they have cut their child poverty rate in half by increasing supports for poor families and investing in children. Their progress has continued in spite of the recession and a change in the governing party. Britain's new conservative-led government has pledged to ensure that deficit reduction measures do not result in any increase in child poverty. In fact, they raised spending on tax credits for low-income families to ensure this pledge is met. We should make a similar commitment to children.

We ask you to develop a budget that protects children and focuses on cutting child poverty.

Sincerely,

Pete Stark  
Member of Congress

This letter is endorsed by:

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Child Welfare League of America  
First Focus